

SOF Weathermen exploit weather

By Tech. Sgt. Alexandra Stuart
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A major aspect of any operation is weather – something people can't control but must know how to work with, exploit or avoid to safely and successfully execute the mission as proven over time.

One way of getting accurate weather assessments on the battlefield is to employ Air Force weathermen with Special Operations Forces.

"Weather can be decisive in battle," said Staff Sgt. Scott Youtz, 10th Combat Weather Squadron special operations weatherman. "You don't think about how important weather is until it inhibits you."

Special operations weathermen, in short, deploy into the field with their Special Operations Forces counterparts to provide commanders with essential elements of weather.

"We go forward on the battlefield, attached to Army and Air Force special operations units, and provide weather observations and forecasts on the scene right then or where you want to go," he said.

To train weathermen with the skills they need to employ with SOF, they must go through an Air Force Special Operation Command school – the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron Advanced Skill Training course.

Youtz, who has deployed with Special Forces overseas twice as a special operations weatherman, is an instructor at the AFSOC school, teaching Combat Controllers and weathermen advanced training skills.

Not all weathermen are eligible to go to the school. Air Force weathermen first go through their basic weather technical training at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. Afterward, assigned to a special operations unit, they may be accepted to go through the advanced skills training school. Once selected for the course, they attend Phase III — one of the four phases offered at the school. Phase III consists of static line, military free fall and water parachuting, alternate insertion and extraction techniques, and helicopter rappelling and fast roping. Other training included in the phase are combat diving, land navigation techniques, and tactical vehicle and small boat operations. This is accomplished in about eight weeks.

Since Youtz is the only instructor at the school to hold a weather Air Force specialty code, he said it gives him a unique perspective on how weathermen must integrate with SF.

A special operations weatherman in the field can provide battlefield weather information for commanders that satellites and forecasters can't, he said. Youtz explained many operational decisions are weighed based on weather conditions such as low ceilings that would prevent certain airframes from flying, rain that could cancel operations, or cold weather that could restrict what a person packs when going to the field.

In the Middle East, there are many weather factors to contend with ranging from blistering hot to frigidly cold temperatures, depending on location, season and wind. There are also dust storms that can last for days. Even without the storms, dust gets into everything on a regular basis, Youtz said.

Tech. Sgt. Michael Stockdale, a Combat Controller with the 23rd STS and instructor, said he's deployed with special operations weathermen numerous times.

"I personally experienced their worth as force multipliers during reconnaissance and surveillance operations," said Stockdale. "The addition of special operations weathermen to our tactical teams greatly enhanced our mission capabilities. Not only did I witness superb weather forecasting skills, I saw resourceful, aggressive special tactics airmen."



Special Operations Forces Weathermen gather climatological/oceanographic data, sonar/lunar data and weather forecasts to support deployment, mission planning, special reconnaissance and redeployment.